The Experiences of Casual 2nd Language English Users: An Ethnographic Study

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Abstract— In our interconnected world, English has become a global lingua franca, facilitating cross-cultural communication. Within the diverse community of second language English users, a unique subgroup of casual users has emerged, using English without it being their primary means of communication. This research adopts an etic perspective to ethnographically explore the experiences of casual second language English users, aiming to gain profound insights into their interactions with the language and broader cultural engagements. The study, with 20 informants from a local college in the Philippines, employs thematic analysis to uncover patterns and themes within participants' experiences. Data collection involves structured questionnaires and face-to-face interviews, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of language usage in casual conversations. Results from the study reveal a diverse spectrum of English proficiency among participants, influenced by factors such as exposure, practice, and supportive correction. The responses of the informants lead to the conclusion of the emphasis to the pivotal role of casual conversations in expanding vocabulary, building confidence, and enhancing comprehension skills. Practical applications of language skills in academic and professional settings are highlighted, underscoring the transformative role of exposure and practice in language learning.

Keywords— ESL, Filipino Language, Native Language, Second Language
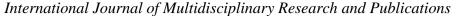
I. INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly interconnected world, English has evolved into a global lingua franca, facilitating cross-cultural communication and bridging linguistic divides (Crystal, 2012; Pennycook, 2017). Within the diverse community of second language English users, a distinct subgroup of casual users has emerged, employing English without it being their primary means of communication (Crystal, 2012). This subset represents a unique and relatively unexplored demographic, providing valuable insights into language acquisition, usage patterns, and intercultural interactions Using an etic perspective—that is, an outsider's viewpoint—the research attempts to ethnographically explore the experiences of casual second language English users (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Through this lens, the objective is to gain profound insights into their interactions with the English language and broader cultural engagements. Additionally, the study seeks to comprehend how these non-professional users adjust to the global environment of language and culture. The study seeks to unravel the complexities, challenges, and experiences shaping linguistic interactions, shedding light on the broader sociocultural context of language use. To achieve a comprehensive and objective analysis, an etic perspective is employed, ensuring an "outsider's viewpoint" (Pike, 1967) that facilitates a holistic understanding of the participants' experiences.

This research aims to deepen the understanding of second language users' experiences in casual English conversations, providing valuable insights into the intricate realm of linguistic interactions, particularly among college students in the Philippines. By applying thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), the investigators aim to identify recurring themes and patterns in the experiences of the participants, which will shed light on the social, cultural, and psychological elements that impact their language use. To gather the necessary data, a combination of structured questionnaires and face-to-face interviews is employed. The questionnaire systematically collects information on participants' language usage in casual conversations (Fowler, 2013). Employing an ethnographic research approach deeply rooted in the social and behavioral sciences, the study conducts observations and interviews to explore the dynamics of societies and individuals in their natural habitat (Lofland et al., 2006). Through this research, the aim is to unveil the rich mosaic of experiences articulated by casual second language English users during informal conversations. This endeavor significantly contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of linguistic diversity in contemporary, multicultural society. View the perspectives of individuals who interact with English on a casual basis can provide a more nuanced view of the complex dynamics of language and culture in the globalized world, especially as English continues to grow in its role. (Crystal, 2012; Kramsch, 2018).

In doing so, the research illuminates the paths of those navigating intercultural terrain, highlighting the manifold ways in which language shapes their lives. Delving into the world of casual second language English users enriches the understanding of linguistic diversity and enhances the ability to foster effective communication and cooperation across cultural boundaries, contributing to a more harmonious global society. This research embarks on a voyage to explore the intricacies of casual English conversations among second language users in a particular sociocultural context, thereby adding depth to the broader comprehension of language use and communication in multicultural settings.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

English has solidified its position as a global lingua franca, transcending national borders and serving as a common means of communication among individuals from diverse linguistic

backgrounds (Seidlhofer, 2011). Within this context, the phenomenon of casual English use by second language speakers has emerged as a distinct area of interest. Recent studies emphasize the significance of casual conversations in facilitating language acquisition and cultural adaptation (Richards, 2015; Choi & Nunan, 2018).

The Philippines, with its historical and linguistic diversity, presents a unique context for studying casual English conversations among second language users. While earlier literature has explored the broader dynamics of English language use in the country (Rubio, 2016), recent research delves into the specific nuances of casual communication. Studies conducted among college students in the Philippines highlight the multifaceted role of casual conversations, with the integration of different strategies such as code switching, in vocabulary expansion, confidence building, and practical language application (Jose et al., 2019; Villanueva & Gamiao, 2022). There were also recent considerations on the applications of these strategies in blended learning modality brought upon by the COVID-19 pandemic (Tolentino-De Leon, 2022; Tarrayo et al., 2023).

Recent advances in the field are reflected in the research approaches used to examine casual English use. While participant observation and interviews are still fundamental components of ethnographic research (Hymes, 2016; Galvez et al., 2023), newer studies frequently include cutting-edge methods like digital ethnography and online interactions (Berti, 2020). These methods offer a more comprehensive understanding of the diverse contexts in which casual English conversations unfold.

The implications of casual English conversations extend beyond individual language acquisition. Insights from recent studies underscore the necessity of integrating real-life, casual conversation experiences into language education curricula and the language classroom itself (Galvez et al., 2023). Since language educators have "an essential role in language learning" (Valentino, 2022), they can draw on these findings to design pedagogical approaches that enhance students' language proficiency and cultural adaptability in practical, everyday communication scenarios.

Despite the progress in recent research, there are notable limitations. Many studies are geographically specific, necessitating more diverse samples to enhance generalizability. The reliance on self-reporting in some studies poses a challenge, emphasizing the need for objective measures of language proficiency. Longitudinal studies should be taken into account in future research in order to track the development of language proficiency and cultural adaptability over time.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Methods

Ethnographic research was used in this paper. Ethnographic research involved researchers immersing themselves in the environment or community they wanted to study. It observed, participated in activities, and interacted with the people being studied over a long time to gain a deep and holistic understanding of their culture, behaviors, beliefs,

and social dynamics. Ethnographers often relied on methods such as participant observation, interviews, and document analysis to collect data.

B. Participants of the Study

All of the college students at National University Baliwag City, Bulacan, Philippines, served as informants for this study. Purposive sampling was employed as the sampling method, choosing only those who speak the English language as their second language and on a "casual" or daily basis. This means that regardless of the environment with first language users, they still utilize the English language in conversing with others. A conscious choice was taken to just enlist 10 to twenty people for the interviews—a small sample size judged adequate to produce accurate data and significant findings.

C. Instrument and Data Gathering Procedure

To gather data, the researcher used a questionnaire, which is a carefully constructed list of questions meant for the informants to respond to. Face-to-face communication was utilized to conduct interviews and solicit relevant data needed to address the study's research questions. The questionnaire was submitted to 3 professionals with postgraduate degrees in language teaching for validation purposes and peer debriefing before finalization. These professionals served as authorities to validate the questionnaire used in the interviews.

D. Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was employed in this research to thoroughly explore individual experiences of participants regarding the use of the 2nd language in casual conversations or interactions. Thematic analysis involved organizing and categorizing information to uncover key ideas or topics, aiding in the extraction of the main messages or concepts within the data.

E. Ethical Considerations

In this specific field, the study implemented the 5 acts of Ethical Consideration, comprising voluntary participation, anonymity, confidentiality, potential for harm, and informed consent, for the voluntary participants involved in the study. Compliance with the Data Privacy Act of the Philippines was ensured throughout the research process.

IV. RESULTS

The replies from the informants as a whole show a wide range of English confidence and skill. Their views and methods for getting better are greatly influenced by things like exposure, practice, and supportive correction. The themes identified provide valuable insights into the nuances of casual English conversations among second language users.

V. DISCUSSION

Participants emphasized the pivotal role of casual conversations in expanding vocabulary and enhancing language proficiency by exposing them to native speakers and natural language environments. Furthermore, engaging in casual conversations emerged as a key factor in building confidence among participants, positively impacting their

ability to use English comfortably. Notably, the language skills developed through casual interactions were found to have practical applications in academic and professional settings, aiding participants in tasks such as answering questions, constructing sentences, and comprehending information. Additionally, the discussion underscores the enhanced comprehension skills resulting from casual conversations, particularly in work or academic contexts. Moreover, some participants actively sought to enrich their vocabulary by proactively learning new words and phrases encountered during these informal exchanges, indicating a dedicated effort towards continuous improvement in language skills.

TABLE I. Experiences of Casual 2nd Language English Users from the Etic Perspective.

Condensed Meaning Unit	Codes	Themes
The informants perceive their proficiency in English to be varying degrees of competence, with some describing themselves as average or slightly informal, while others express confidence in their well-spoken and proficient abilities.	not good	Proficiency and Confidence Level
	not bad	
	average	
	slightly informal	
	well-spoken/proficient	
Confidence levels in speaking English casually vary among informants. Some express a lack of confidence due to perceived deficiencies, while others are confident, very confident, or situation-dependent in their English-speaking abilities.	Not confident	
	lacking confidence	
	confident	
	very confident	
Informants attribute their confidence levels to factors.	exposure to literature and shows	Factors Influencing Confidence
	correction and encouragement.	
Situational factors also play a role, with some expressing confidence with friends but not with strangers.	practice	
	exposure at home	
Informants suggest various strategies for improving their receptive skills (listening and reading).	reading books	Improvement Strategies
	watching English movies	
Informants suggest various strategies for improving their productive skill (speaking only).	literal English conversation	
	frequent use of English	
	correction in a supportive manner	
Informants highlight the positive impact of communication with others who speak English, emphasizing learning from different mannerisms, looking up new words, and applying learned words to express themselves more effectively.	learning from communication	Learning from Others
	exposure to different mannerisms	
	looking up new words	
	applying learned words	

VI. LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Limitations

Sampling Bias: The study focused on college students at a specific location in the Philippines, limiting the generalizability of the findings to a broader population. Future research should consider a more diverse sample.

Self-Reporting: The data collected heavily relies on self-reporting, which can be subject to bias and inaccuracies. It would be beneficial to incorporate more objective measures of language proficiency in future studies.

Limited Interview Size: The number of face-to-face interviews conducted was relatively small (20 participants), which may not capture the full range of experiences within this demographic.

B. Recommendations

Future research endeavors should strive for greater participant diversity, encompassing individuals from a myriad of cultural and linguistic backgrounds. This approach is essential to acquiring a more expansive and nuanced understanding of casual second language English users. The integration of both qualitative and quantitative measures of language proficiency can offer a comprehensive and multifaceted insight into participants' abilities and experiences. A particularly promising avenue for future exploration involves conducting longitudinal studies that track participants over an extended period, unraveling the intricacies of how language skills and cultural adaptability evolve and transform over time. To foster a broader global perspective, comparative research across different geographic regions and cultural contexts is warranted, shedding light on both commonalities and divergences in the experiences of casual second language English users. Language educators, drawing inspiration from these findings, should consider integrating real-life, casual conversation experiences into their pedagogical approaches. By creating opportunities for students to engage authentically in unstructured conversations with native or proficient English speakers, educators can profoundly enhance students' language proficiency and cultural adaptability, fostering a more holistic and practical language learning experience.

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